

Industrial Education as It Should Be Introduced and Maintained in Public Schools of New Mexico

Dr. C. M. Light, President of New Mexico Normal School at Silver City in Masterly Paper Presents Arguments for Adoption by Public School System of This State of Practical Training Given Pupil in Other States; Pressing Need of Schools Must Be Supplied in Intelligent and Practical Manner

(By Dr. C. M. Light.)

Industrial education, while a new thing in New Mexico, has been in vogue in many of the other states for years. The law passed by our last legislative assembly in reference to it was the first attempt at state recognition. This law provides for a general supervisor of industrial education but fails to present a plan to introduce it. In providing for such an officer probably our legislature did not have a definite idea of his duties. There are but few of our schools that give courses in industrial training and these do not need the assistance of a general supervisor. Perhaps it was intended that this officer, single-handed, should reorganize our whole school system on the industrial plan. What ever the intentions were in the absence of more helpful laws on the subject, the present law, of itself, can accomplish but little. I base this judgment not only upon what is being done in industrial education in other states but also upon the peculiar conditions existing in our own state. The history of successfully introducing industrial education into all classes of public schools in other states is an open book. The conditions and the methods employed are all described in the literature on this subject and may be had for the asking. For this reason it was not necessary to try an educational experiment in this connection. But the law placing the state board of education with certain powers relative to industrial education and directing the state superintendent to appoint a state director of industrial education is in force and we are to work out whatever benefits there may be derived therefrom.

As I understand it this law is not self-operative. There is no penalty provided for those who fail to observe its requirements or those who do not respect the acts of the parties operating under its provisions. Our independent school districts may or may not respond to its demands. The state board of education has the option of adopting a course of study for industrial education, including domestic science, manual training and agriculture, and can make the necessary rules and regulations for the being taught in the public schools of the state. The state superintendent is not only empowered but directed to appoint a state director of industrial education who shall qualify as competent to inaugurate and to direct the teaching of these industrial branches in conformity to his wishes. According to this interpretation the officials concerned can exercise their good offices in behalf of introducing and regulating a system of industrial education within the state, practically this and nothing more.

As far as my knowledge goes there is not a single public school in the state conducting courses in agriculture. A few are teaching manual training and a few number domestic science. In most instances these

branches are being taught by the departmental plan. The work is not uniform. Each teacher is pursuing a course of study in which he or she has been specially trained. As a rule such teachers do not welcome assistance from outside sources. There are many other schools, of course, which are financially able to provide an industrial education for their children, but they have not yet awakened to the importance of the matter. There are still others which realize its importance, but do not have it because the departmental method is too expensive and their regular teachers have not been trained to do the work. But the greater portions of our schools, especially in rural districts, not only have teachers that are incompetent to teach these specialties but are financially unable to provide for them. Many of these schools barely have enough money to meet the requirements of the law as to the length of term and the common school branch, which they rightfully regard, as first in importance. Paraphrasing it may be said here that the common branches are of first importance because there is no occupation that does not call for their use. The person that is ignorant of them finds himself handicapped not alone in business but at every turn in his life. Moreover, without the aid of the school there are very few persons that acquire a knowledge of them. These statements apply more or less to the industrial branches but not to the same extent.

It is true the state board has the power to compel teachers to pass an examination on the industrial studies. Such an examination would of necessity be a book test. Teachers could easily cram and pass these and still be unable to actually train pupils in cooking, making and plant culture. Besides, because a teacher is qualified to teach a subject, does it necessarily follow that his school board will have it done?

Some have advocated a cheap improvised equipment for teaching these subjects. The success of such a practice would therefore lack uniformity. Besides, what is taught in these lines should be worth while. In the absence of direct supervision, our country schools especially should work under standard conditions. Whatever is done should be sufficient to command the respect of the patrons of the school, conform to a uniform course of study, and be presented according to the principles of first class instruction. Otherwise, it should not be done at all. Without stopping to give reasons this statement especially applies to instruction given in all the manual arts.

In view of all these things, how can this general supervisor of industrial education be of any value to the schools of the state? As we have intimated he has no power of himself, under the law, to initiate nor to control that which already exists. To

comparatively speaking, the introduction of the industrial branches into our schools is not as simple as it seems at first sight. When one wishes to introduce a new academic branch into the curriculum the content of the school board, the expenditure of a few cents for a text, and a competent teacher is all that is absolutely necessary. On the other hand, when an industrial branch is introduced according to the acceptable methods of teaching these subjects, all these are required and more. Material for construction, tools, and other equipment, as well as a suitable work room must be provided. For the academic studies pupils furnish their own texts. But the expense for industrial equipment is too great and too miscellaneous distributed to be borne individually. The school as a whole must bear these expenses.

It is a well known fact that a majority of our school houses are not fit for occupancy and many school districts own none at all. Considering also the shortness of the school term and the low wages of teachers, would it be advisable to ask the school authorities of such districts to incur these additional expenses? In our opinion these are matters to be remedied only by legislation. Means should be devised whereby the state should see that every school community be given a comfortable school room and a special grant to cover the additional expenses of teaching the industrial branches.

But many of our school communities have ample funds and fully realize the value of these studies but they are loath to begin the work. Neither their boards nor their teachers have an adequate conception of the nature and cost of the proper equipment to carry forward a standard course in these subjects per school room. Here is an opportunity for the supervisor to prove himself of value. Let him assemble the necessary items with the cost of same laid down at various points in the state and then distribute these statements to our school officials.

There is still another way by which a supervisor may assist. It is possible to run a model school as an object lesson to all schools similarly situated. There are school districts, no doubt, which would be glad to place themselves under the direction of a competent supervisor, one who is capable of commanding the respect of both teachers and patrons. The expenses might be borne either by the state or by the school itself. The operations and the educational results carry on a "campaign of influence"

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or such a school might be described in a bulletin and sent out as an incentive to others.

But how are our teachers to be made competent to teach the industrial branches? Negatively—not by examining for examinations on these subjects, not simply by studying about them. All trades and all the particular processes performed in these trades are described in books for the benefit of the trades people and the public generally. Should an inexperienced man read up on the subject of plumbing and then apply to his town council for a license to practice his trade his request would be promptly refused. Would it not be just as absurd to set a teacher to experiment at the expense of the children, and even more so?

Positively—by correlating the teacher's text book knowledge with his practice. The incompetent teacher must have actually passed through the same processes, under expert guidance, as he expects to lead his pupils. The tradesman learns to ply his craft by rule of thumb, but the

others have this knowledge neither theoretically nor practically. How shall this knowledge be acquired by them without their schools being deprived of their services? This can be done by working under special supervision or by taking the industrial studies in the Normal school or some other institution during the summer vacation. By attending the Normal summer session of eight weeks for two successive years, first and second grade teachers, at least, can be qualified to carry forward the state board's course of study in these branches. The county and district institutes may be utilized also for this purpose. Two weeks is a short time to do much but by the authorities excusing teachers from instruction in other branches for several years, more time may be secured for these particular ones. By combining county institutes and sending forth a corps of expert supervisors of manual training and domestic art, teachers thus may be qualified for either examinations or to work as a teacher. But these operations will require more

money than is available for such purposes. The next legislative assembly must come forward with a scheme for raising a sufficient sum to meet these extra demands.

Our position in regard to this matter is apparent. The present law, as far as introducing and supervising industrial instruction in our public schools is concerned, is of little value. Were the industrial branches already introduced and the people loyally supporting them the case might be different. A general supervisor clothed with proper authority would then have something to supervise and if competent could prove himself or herself of inestimable value to the schools. Let us first examine every school district which is financially able to conduct an eight months' term to teach at least one of the industrial branches. If these others will naturally follow. The state department should be encouraged to employ one or more expert industrial teachers who should be well

(Continued on Page 6, Column 5)



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